



Toward a history of nautical archaeology: Boats and history by Éric Rieth (review)

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Book review: Éric Rieth, *Pour une histoire de l'archéologie navale. Les bateaux et l'histoire* [translation], Paris, Classiques Garnier (Histoire des techniques, 17), 2019.

Éric Rieth is a renowned nautical archaeologist, head of the underwater archaeology department at Musée national de la Marine in Paris, who has always shown a deep interest in its collections and in the founders of his discipline. He has conducted a historiographical investigation on ship archaeology which is both an introduction to this discipline for non-specialists and an epistemological reflection for fellow researchers. Although archaeologists have long been interested in the history of their discipline, this work stands out for its focus on the long history of ship archaeology and the currents of thought running through it. Published in Classiques Garnier's collection "Histoire des techniques" and subtitled *Les bateaux et l'histoire*, the book focuses on how the history of shipbuilding has been written since the sixteenth century. It is in French, so some discipline-related vocabulary might be difficult to set out, even though Rieth refers to similar issues in other languages in order to demonstrate what is at stake in characterizing the discipline.

Rieth selects authors and archaeological excavations as intellectual or methodological milestones in the construction of the discipline and highlights the text with useful illustrations. The lexicon at the end is very useful for non-specialists. The book is structured in seven sections, mainly chronological but also thematical, hence the reappearance of some characters as proof of their importance in ship archaeology but also in the author's hall of fame and network.

The quest for origins takes us back to the Renaissance in Venice, when many treatises on naval architecture appeared despite the fact that technical culture was what Leroi-Gourhan describes as one of gesture and speech. Although more like guide books on how to build a ship than reports on theoretical knowledge, these studies formed the context for Lazare de Baïf to publish, in 1536, *De Re Navali*, a historical study of Ancient Mediterranean galleys and their rowing schemes. Rieth considers this work the first book on ship archaeology. De Baïf gathered literary and iconographic sources, interpreting them through his own technical culture.

Over the centuries, authors became more critical of ancient sources and looked beyond rowing schemes towards more interest in the ship as a whole technical system. Even though Dutchman Nicolaes Witsen had already studied medieval shipbuilding in the North and Baltic seas in the 1670s, the interest in different times and nautical cultures really developed during the 1800s. This major period for the development of nautical archaeology and ethnography occupies three of the book's seven sections, covering the parallel formation of distinct schools of thought in France and Scandinavia. Following Augustin Jal, French researchers developed a historical and technological approach to shipbuilding based on "word and image," whereas a few authors followed Edmond Pâris's lead in seeing boats as "actors and witnesses of history" as François Beaudouin defined a century later.

Several major excavations took place in Scandinavia in the second half of the nineteenth century. These revolutionized ship archaeology because they brought actual archaeologists to the fore instead of specialists in naval architecture. The excavations enabled comparisons with living traditions of shipbuilding and the recreation and valorization of archaeological remains in museums.

The author acknowledges Ole Crumlin-Pedersen's worthy contribution to , then moves on to the history of diving and its introduction in underwater archaeology. He focuses on the French

“mousquemers,” marine officers and divers who led the Grand Congloué excavation and initiated new techniques. Important in his account is George F. Bass, a pioneer in the field of underwater archaeology with the major Cape Gelidonya and Yassiada excavations. He also discusses the introduction of Nautical Archaeology as an academic discipline.

Rieth considers Keith Muckelroy’s theoretical reflection and interpretive framework for better understanding the ship in its original social context to be a real breakthrough in nautical archaeology as it definitively brought together technology and culture in its broadest sense. Rieth applies Bertrand Gille’s contribution to enhance the importance of the history of technology’s conceptual framework in ship archaeology. He does not avoid debates and branches that split the community: on the contrary, by exposing them, Rieth aims to prove the maturity of his discipline. And whatever these differences, in providing a historiography of naval archaeology, Rieth emphasizes its contribution to understanding the functions of ships since ancient times. In his view, naval archaeology is a human science, be it independent, or a branch of maritime archaeology. As such, it is a part of historical science, as in France, or of the social sciences, as in North America.

Géraldine Barron is a researcher in maritime history and the history of technology. She recently published *Edmond Pâris et l’art naval. Des pirogues aux cuirassés*, Presses universitaires du Midi, « Histoire & Technique », 2019.